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FITZGERALD FAVORITES


Rubetown Minstrels

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PLAYHOUSE PLAYS

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New York City

Rubetown Minstrels

A Novelty Entertainment in One Act

By
FREDERICK G. JOHNSON

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PLAYHOUSE PLAYS
FITZGERALD PUBLISHING CORPORATION
NEW YORK

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OF
FORT WAYNE AND ALLEN COUNTY, IND.

Rubetown Minstrels

CHARACTERS

TOM KITTLE.....	<i>The village barber</i>
BILL.....	<i>The garage man</i>
ZEKE SMITHERS.....	<i>The constable</i>
SI CORNTOSSEL.....	<i>The postmaster</i>
RUBE JENKS.....	<i>The storekeeper</i>
KITTY.....	<i>A young, pretty milliner</i>
LIZZIE SPRIGGS.....	<i>The old maid</i>
HATTIE SMITHERS.....	<i>Zeke's wife</i>
NANCY CORNTOSSEL.....	<i>Si's wife</i>

And also

Any number of village boys and girls for CHORUS.

NOTE.—The female parts may be impersonated by males, making this a novel entertainment for male characters.

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COSTUMES AND CASTING

In costuming this entertainment the typical stage "rube" type should be followed, but there should be plenty of variety in dress, make-up and mannerisms.

TOM and BILL are young fellows and should of course be smooth shaven, and their clothing should be a little more up to date than that of the others. In fact they may wear everyday clothes of modern cut. For the change to minstrel attire they blacken up as hereafter explained, put on darky minstrel wigs and black cotton gloves, and change to freshly laundered white barber coats and enormous bow ties of bright colors.

ZEKE and SI are typical "old rubes" and should wear old, worn clothes and be made up with chin whiskers. ZEKE requires a bald or semi-bald Uncle Josh or farmer wig. SI chews gum constantly. They wear vests but no coats, and have their shirt sleeves rolled back.

RUBE is smooth shaven and middle aged. He wears an old and poorly fitting full dress or tuxedo suit, and an old high hat.

KITTY is young and pretty, and is neatly dressed.

LIZZIE is a typical old maid, hair done in corkscrew curls, loud dress, silly, simpering manner and very coy with the men.

HATTIE and NANCY are older, and costumed in countrified "dress-up" fashion.

If a CHORUS is desired, any number of extra men, or men and girls, can be used, all dressed in costumes appropriate to the "Rubetown" setting.

NOTE:—Be careful not to overdo the dialect. TOM and BILL talk in natural manner, and the other men may speak with a slight nasal twang, but the director must insist that all speeches be made so that they will be easily understood by the audience.

Baker
JAN 11 1947

STAGE ARRANGEMENT

The scene represents a lodge room, and can be set on any platform since there are only two doors, one at either side. If no chorus people the benches may be omitted, with just enough chairs for the principals. If large chorus is used, additional chairs and benches may be added.

The stove is a small kerosene heating stove and has inside, out of view of audience, a saucer containing a small amount of well moistened prepared minstrel black for TOM and BILL to use in starting to blacken up when they apparently scrape soot from the inside of the stove for that purpose.

For the second part the scene is the same, being rearranged for a minstrel show. The benches are placed diagonally from down L. and from down R. to platform up c. Chairs are placed in a circle to accommodate soloists. Chorus sits on benches. If small chorus is used all persons may sit in the circle instead of having rear row of chorus people.

MUSIC

Choice of songs is left to the discretion of director or committee. Either old-time songs or popular numbers may be used. In any case the minstrel should open and close with a good minstrel opening and closing chorus.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

As seen by a performer on the stage facing the audience, R. means right hand; L., left hand; c., center of stage; D. R., door at right; D. L., door at left of stage. UP means toward back of stage; DOWN, toward footlights.

Rubetown Minstrels

SCENE.—*The village lodge room. Any plain interior, with door R., supposed to lead to the outside, and door L., supposed to lead to an inside room. Large arm chair on slightly raised platform UP C., with straight chair at either side. Directly in front and slightly to R. of arm chair is a small stand with a chairman's gavel on it. Benches are against back wall. Eight or more plain chairs are distributed about the room in no regular formation. DOWN L. is a small kerosene heating stove. Other fittings and decorations appropriate for a country lodge room may be added. DISCOVERED RUBE standing in front of arm chair, gavel in hand. ZEKE is seated at RUBE'S R. and SI at RUBE'S L. TOM and BILL are seated in other chairs. ZEKE is asleep and snoring, his head tilted forward. If additional men are used, they appear as additional lodge members and additional seats are provided for them.*

RUBE. Well, brothers, if there ain't no fu'ther business to come before this here lodge, there don't seem to be nothin' to do only to close 'er up. Do I hear a motion?

SI. I don't hear nothin' only Zeke snorin' his head off.

RUBE. Shet up, Si. You're out of order.

SI. Ain't out of order, nuther. Never felt better in my life.

RUBE. I can't teach you fellers nothin' 'bout the rules of order, if I try a million years. (*Raises gavel high*) Not hearin' no objection, I hereby declare this here lodge —— (*Is halted by shrill yell of ZEKE, who wakes and looks up suddenly just in time to see the gavel about to descend on his head*)

ZEKE (*scared, yells*). Hey!

RUBE (*checks descent of gavel and looks at ZEKE*). Oh, 'scuse me, Zeke. My mistake.

ZEKE. What in Sam Hill are you trying to do? Murder me in cold blood?

RUBE. Well, Zeke, that bald head o' yourn looks so all-fired much like a marble slab that I jest natchally mighty nigh fetched this here gavel down on the wrong block.

ZEKE (*sore*). You jest mighty nigh brained me, that's what you done.

RUBE. Ain't no damage, is they? I got to adjourn this here lodge, ain't I?

ZEKE. You kin adjourn it without committin' highway assault an' battery, can't you? Put that gravel down an' leave 'er down.

RUBE. This ain't no gravel. It's a gavel.

SI (*laughs*). I reckon Zeke don't know the difference 'twixt a gravel and a gavel.

ZEKE (*mad*). Is that so! Who says I don't?

SI. I say you don't.

ZEKE (*to SI*). A gravel is — Well, a gravel is a little rock.

BILL. Little Rock? That's the name of a town in Arkansaw.

RUBE (*to ZEKE*). Does this here thingamajig (*Showing gavel*) look like Little Rock, Arkansaw?

ZEKE. No. But if you had bounced her on my bean it would 'a' felt like big rock, Gibraltar.

TOM. Oh, what are you howlin' about, Zeke? He couldn't have hurt you anyway.

ZEKE. What do you mean, he couldn't have hurt me? Don't you suppose I got feelin's?

TOM. Not in your head.

ZEKE. Why ain't I got feelin's in my head?

TOM. Where there's no sense there's no feeling.

ZEKE (*jumps up, mad*). See here, you young whipper-snapper, I got a good mind to —

RUBE (*raises gavel high*). Brothers, brothers!

ZEKE (*puts hands over his head*). Look out fer that gravel, Rube! If you gotta lam somebody, lam Si.

RUBE. I gotta adjourn this lodge, ain't I?

ZEKE. I don't give a durn what you do with the lodge, but you gotta adjourn that gravel or I'll hand in my resig—resignate—resig—— (*Is so excited he can't pronounce it*)

SI. Do you know what you're tryin' to say, or are you jest talkin' as usual?

ZEKE. Sure I know what I'm tryin' to say. I'm tryin' to say that I'll hand in my resig—resigni——

RUBE. Zeke, every time you open your mouth, you put your foot in it.

SI. That's it; hoof and mouth disease.

BILL. Zeke, what are you talking about?

ZEKE. I'm talkin' about that gal-bing gravel.

TOM. Looks to me like we forgot one thing. Si, ain't you the chairman of the committee on devising ways and means for putting a new roof on this here hall? Seems like most every time us fellers or the Ladies' Aid or anybody has a meeting here it rains and everybody gets soaked.

ZEKE. Yeah. And if a feller don't git soaked with the rain, he gits soaked with the gravel.

RUBE. That's right. This here is somethin' that can't be neglected no longer. Si, report about a new roof fer the special committee on ways and means.

SI. Well, the committee on ways and means reports all kinds o' ways, but no means. We ain't got a blame cent in the treasury.

ZEKE. Aw, what's the use to make all this fuss about a leaky old roof?

SI. Yeah. You're sore because Rube made me chairman of the special committee. You been chairman of the house committee fer nigh on to eleven years. Why didn't you fix it?

ZEKE. What's the use? When it rained we couldn't fix it.

SI. Then why didn't you fix the roof when it wasn't rainin'?

ZEKE. When there wa'n't no rain the roof was all right.

BILL. I move we adjourn.

RUBE. We gotta git this here roof question settled. Me. I'm in favor of suthin' economical, like tar.

ZEKE. Tar ain't lastin'.

SI. Well then, Zeke, what's the matter with gravel?
(*Knocking heard off D. R.*)

RUBE (*sternly*). Brother of the inner door, what's all that there racket?

TOM. Alarums and excursions without, exalted one.

SI. Without what?

ZEKE. Without a doubt.

RUBE. Brother of the inner door, you will confer and advise with the candidate, and if he proves himself to be of noble and honorable intent —

SI. Aw shucks, Rube, that ain't what you're supposed to say.

ZEKE. Naw, what do you think this is? Initiation?

RUBE (*pounding on stand with gavel*). Shut up! I mean, order!

ZEKE (*cautiously*). Look out there, Rube. You might loosen the head on that there gravel.

TOM (*has crossed to D. R., calls*). Who goes there to disturb the privacy of this solemn meeting in the inner sanctum?

HATTIE (*off R.*). Is Zeke Smithers in there?

SI (*in loud whisper*). Zeke, it's your old woman!

ZEKE (*in loud whisper*). Tell her I've went home.

SI (*laughs loudly, slaps leg*). Haw, haw, haw! Skeered of a woman!

NANCY (*off R.*). Is Si Corntossel in there?

ZEKE. Huh! That's Si's old lady.

SI (*in loud whisper*). Tell Nancy you ain't saw me to-night.

ZEKE (*laughs loudly, slaps leg*). Haw, haw, haw! Skeered of a woman!

TOM (*calls*). You can't come in, ladies. The lodge is in session.

HATTIE. Who says we can't come in?

RUBE (*calls*). Git away from there, you females. We got a lodge meetin'. We can't leave you in.

NANCY. You leave us in or we'll bust the door down. Get ready for a good shove, Hattie.

RUBE (*to TOM*). Might as well leave 'em in, Tom. We ain't got no money fer a new door.

ZEKE. Rube, hang on to that gravel. It's safer in your hands than it would be in Hattie's. (*Tom opens D. R.*)

ENTER HATTIE *and* NANCY, D. R.

NANCY (*hands on hips, looks around*). Humph! Settin' around, as usual.

HATTIE. Doin' nothin', doin' nothin'. (*Goes to D. R., calls off*) Come on in, girls.

ENTER KITTY *and* LIZZIE D. R. *If additional women are used, they follow after KITTY and LIZZIE.*

SI. Hey, you, what's the meanin' of this here interruption?

NANCY (*tartly*). Shut yer face, Si Corntossel, an' speak when you're spoken to, like you do to home. (*To RUBE*) We come on business.

LIZZIE (*simpering*). Oh, dear me! I feel so all of a-fluster with all these men around!

RUBE. You come on business, eh? Well, ladies ——

HATTIE. We jest come from a Aid meetin' in the church basement. The question is, what are you goin' to do about fixin' this roof?

RUBE. We was jest a-talkin' about that. We was ——

NANCY. Humph! "Jest a-talkin'." That's about as fur as you men folks ever do git, is jest a-talkin'. Well, me and Hattie and Kitty and Lizzie here, we was named a committee to see the lodge ——

RUBE. Jest a minute. What kind of a committee?

NANCY. A joint committee. We was ——

SI (*emphatically*). Nothin' doin'! This place may be a dump, but no committee is goin' to make a joint out of it.

NANCY. Shut up, Si Corntossel, or you'll git that jaw of yourn out of joint in a minute. Well, gentlemen, we figgered out how to raise the money for the roof, and we have everything planned. You men ain't much use, but you kin help.

RUBE. What's the big idee, Nancy?

NANCY. We'll git up a minstrel show.

ZEKE. What's a minstrel show?

SI. It's a sort of a second cousin to a gravel.

BILL. That's great. Won't Zeke and Si look funny with burnt cork all over their whiskers?

ZEKE. I object! I won't burn my whiskers off fer nobody.

RUBE. Sounds good to me; a reg'lar minstrel show. Well, we gotta have two comical niggers. I appoint Tom and Bill to black up.

BILL. Why pick on us?

RUBE. You bein' in the garage business, you always got a dirty face anyway, an' Tom bein' the village barber, he has a reputation fer bein' quite a cut-up.

KITTY. As long as everybody is agreeable, why not have a rehearsal right here and now?

BILL. All right, I'm game. Come on, Tom.

TOM. What's the use of bothering with burnt cork? Let's take the soot out of this oil heater. (*TOM and BILL start blacking up at oil heater. They apply black to cheeks, forehead and nose, leaving mouth and eye outlining and finishing to be done after they exeunt*)

BILL (*blacking up*). How about our comical costumes?

TOM (*also blacking up*). I have a couple of barber coats in the other room. What's the matter with them?

HATTIE. Land's sakes, boys! You're goin' to get that black stuff all over everything. Clear out with you now, and come back when you git done with all them heathen fixin's.

BILL. All right. You tell the other folks what to do, and depend on us.

[BILL and TOM EXEUNT D. L., *taking oil heater.*

(NOTE:—*They now finish blacking up off stage and make quick change to minstrel attire*)

KITTY. Well, gentlemen, aren't you going to ask us to sit down?

RUBE. Sure thing, gals. Set right down and make yourselves to hum.

ZEKE. That's right. Have a couple o' cheers. Have all the cheers they is, except the one I'm settin' in. Miss Lizzie, be you a-goin' to blacken up?

LIZZIE. I? Oh, dear mercy me, no!

SI. She don't have to. She's comical enough when she's jest natural.

RUBE. Well, Hattie, you seem to be the boss. What do we do next?

HATTIE. We have to have an interlocutor.

SI. Mebbe Bill could lend us one. Down in his gay-rage he has all kinds of machinery.

HATTIE. An interlocutor ain't a machine. It's a man.

SI. Oh, I know what you mean. A feller that talks all kinds o' heathen languages.

HATTIE (*disgusted*). I ain't talkin' about a interpreter. I said interlocutor.

ZEKE (*laughs, slaps leg*). Haw, haw, that's good!

HATTIE. The interlocutor is the middle man.

ZEKE. Then I'm ag'in havin' one into this here show.

HATTIE. Why?

ZEKE. 'Cause the papers say the middleman is the feller that gits all the farmers' profits.

SI (*laughs, slaps leg*). Haw, haw, that's good!

KITTY (*to RUBE*). Mr. Jenks has a dress suit, and that's the most important part. You'll be interlocutor, won't you, Mr. Jenks?

RUBE. Looks like I'm elected. What next?

HATTIE. Well, we all set around in a kind of a circle like, and Bill and Tom will have their faces all blacked up, and different ones will sing songs, and in between you will have to crack some jokes. I'll show you all about it.

NANCY. Yes, and we thought as how it would be a good idea to have somebody do some kind of a speciality out in front of the curtain, jest like they do in regular vaudeville the-aytres. Kitty (*Or whoever is to do specialty*) has a real nice piece that she can do.

RUBE. All right, Miss Kitty. Suppose you git up and prac-tize your part of the show, and we'll shove things around and rehearse the hull shootin' match right here and now. (*KITTY, or whoever else is selected to do the specialty, goes DOWN stage and CURTAIN is immediately lowered. The specialty may be a song, recitation, a reading or any other novelty, according to talent, and should be of sufficient duration to allow BILL and TOM to complete their minstrel make-up and permit all persons to take their places. At finish of specialty KITTY EXITS at side and immediately takes her place in the circle*)

NOTE:—While KITTY presents her specialty in front of curtain the stage is arranged for the minstrel back of curtain. The benches are placed diagonally from DOWN R. to platform and from DOWN L. to platform. Chairs are placed in a circle for the soloists. Chorus sits on benches. All members of the company take their places on the stage. RUBE is at C. TOM is at one end, BILL at the other, both in minstrel make-up. Next to the ends are ZEKE and SI respectively. Third from ends are KITTY and LIZZIE. Additional people, if used, sit farther toward C. and a rear row may be added. Before curtain rises, piano or orchestra plays introduction to opening chorus.

CURTAIN RISES

DISCOVERED ALL standing in place, singing.

No. 1. Opening Chorus, *by entire company.*

RUBE (*at close of number*). Ladies and gentlemen, be seated. (*Chord by piano or orchestra. ALL sit promptly*) Well, Tom, how are you feelin' this evening?

TOM (*seated*). I feel like Miss —— (*Local girl*) did the night she was expecting her beau to take her to the movies and he didn't show up.

RUBE. That's a funny way to feel. How do you mean?

TOM. All dressed up and no place to go.

RUBE. Si, I hear Dr. —— (*Localize*) was at your house yesterday.

SI. Yep. My mother-in-law is a mighty sick woman.

RUBE. You don't say! Is she goin' to die?

SI. I dunno. I says to her this morning, "Mother-in-law," I says, "for my sake please hurry up and git well."

RUBE. I see. You're usin' the power of suggestion.

SI. Yep. Whatever I tell that woman to do, she allus goes and does jest the opposite, so I got hopes.

RUBE. Zeke, who was that lady I seen you talkin' to in the post-office this mornin'?

ZEKE. That wasn't no lady. That was my wife. (*HATTIE starts to go for ZEKE but is pulled back to her seat by her neighbors*)

RUBE. Bill, I seen you goin' up toward your house with a load of lumber. Are you buildin' a new hen coop?

BILL. No. I'm buildin' a garage for my new goat.

RUBE. I didn't know you had a goat. What kind of a goat have you got?

BILL. He's a very valuable goat. I'm goin' to sell him to a circus. He has four legs and a pair of horns

and everything jest like a ordinary goat, but he has a peculiarity that makes him valuable.

RUBE. What's that?

BILL. He hasn't got any nose.

RUBE. He hasn't got any nose? Well, for goodness' sake, how does he smell?

BILL. Terrible. " " "

RUBE (*rises and announces*). Mr. Tom Kittle will render a song entitled (*Name of song*)

No. 2. Song by TOM. Others join in chorus.

RUBE (*after number*). Zeke, was you ever in love?

ZEKE. You bet your boots I was in love. I was courtin' Hattie when I was goin' on seventeen.

RUBE. I see. Sort o' puppy love.

ZEKE. I reckon it was puppy love. I've led a dog's life ever since. (*HATTIE starts for ZEKE as before, and is repressed by her neighbors*)

RUBE. Si, you seem to be thinkin' deeply about somethin'. What's on your mind?

SI. I was jest thinkin'.

RUBE. Thinkin' about what?

SI. Somethin' that they's a pile of money in.

RUBE (*interested*). Do tell! I wouldn't mind bein' put next to a pile of money.

SI. I kin tell you how to get next to somethin' they's a pile of money in.

RUBE. How?

SI. Go down street and lean against the First National Bank.

RUBE. Lizzie, I ain't no hand to gossip, but the neighbors do say as how they was a young man—a well-dressed young man—looked like a city feller—called at your house this afternoon.

LIZZIE. Mercy sakes, Rube, do you mean to say the neighbors ain't got nothin' better to do than to pass around that kind o' small talk?

RUBE. Well, Lizzie, I'm only sayin' what I been hearin'. It ain't none o' my business.

LIZZIE. Well, sence you went and brung the subject up, I ain't no hand to go and deny what's the gospel truth. Yes, they *was* a city feller called at my house this afternoon.

RUBE. Neighbors was kind o' wonderin' who he might be.

LIZZIE. Well, you can tell the neighbors that he was a man with a history.

RUBE. A man with a history? Do tell! Who was he?

LIZZIE. A book agent!

RUBE (*rises and announces*). Miss Kitty will now sing (*Name of song*)

No. 3. *Song by KITTY. Others join in chorus.*

TOM (*after number*). Say, Rube, did you hear about the argument down at the barber shop last Saturday night?

RUBE. Don't believe I did, Tom. What did they seem to be disputifyin' about?

TOM. Well, Ed White (*Localize*) was readin' in a newspaper about a feller in Salt Lake City that had married three women, and Sam Black (*Localize*) said it wasn't possible, and they was a law against it, and Ed said the paper said he was a Mormon, and Sam said that if he married three wives it wasn't a case of more-man, but more-woman, and —

RUBE. Hold on there. I reckon you don't know what a Mormon is, do you?

TOM. No, I don't. What is it?

RUBE. A Mormon is a man that thinks it's all right to have a lot of wives. He marries one woman, and then he marries another woman, and then he marries a third woman, and then he marries a fourth woman, and so on. That's Mormonism. Mormonism is a religion.

TOM (*shocked*). It's a religion, is it? Sounds to me more like a habit.

RUBE. You ain't told us what happened to this feller with the three wives. What did the paper say about him?

TOM. It told about how he moved to San Francisco with his wives and the police arrested him for bigotry.

RUBE. Wait a minute. What did they arrest him for?

TOM. For bigotry.

RUBE. Well, if I ain't surprised with you, Tim Kittle; yes, and ashamed of you, too! What's the use in all this eddication, what's the use in us payin' school taxes and raisin' money fer free libraries an' all, if our young fellers is goin' to go on bein' as ignorant as what you be? Why, anybody in this hull crowd knows better than that. I bet Bill, here, kin put you to shame. (*To BILL*) Bill, would you say as how a feller that had three wives had committed bigotry?

BILL (*emphatically*). I certainly would not.

RUBE. See? Bill knows better. Now, Bill, tell this ignoramus here what you call it when a man has three wives.

BILL. If a man has two wives, that's bigotry. But if he has three wives, that's trigonometry.

RUBE (*rises and announces*). Mr. Zeke Smithers will now render a song entitled (*Name of song*)

No. 4. *Song by ZEKE. Others join in chorus.*

RUBE (*after number*). Lizzie, I want to ask your opinion about somethin'.

LIZZIE. Fire away, Rube.

RUBE. What do you think of a man that goes around with a suit that needs patchin', and with only three buttons on his vest?

LIZZIE. I think he should either get married or divorced.

BILL. Say, Rube, when you die what do you want put on your tombstone for an epigram?

RUBE. Epigram? You mean "epitaph." I swan, Bill, I'm afeared you're as ignorant as Tom, after all. Tom, would you mind givin' Bill an example of what a real epigram is?

TOM. Sure. A example of a epigram is, "Thirty days."

RUBE. Thirty days? That ain't no epigram.

TOM. A judge says "Thirty days" to me once.

RUBE. You don't know what an epigram is.

TOM. I do so. A epigram is a short sentence that sounds light but gives you considerable to think about. And when the judge said "Thirty days," that sure was some epigram.

RUBE. Anyway, what Bill was talkin' about was epitaphs.

BILL. All right, then; epitaphs. I don't care. I was going to tell you about one I saw on a tombstone in the cemetery when I was over to ——— (*Name of near-by town*)

RUBE. Go ahead. Let's hear it.

BILL. It went like this:

Here lies my wife, Samanthy Proctor,
She ketched a cold and wouldn't doctor;
And now she's left this world of woe—
Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

RUBE (*laughs*). That was purty good. Did you see any more?

BILL. Yep. Here's another one:

Erected to the memory
Of Ebenezer Quince;
He lit the fire with kerosene
And hasn't benzene since.

LIZZIE. Humph! 'Pears to me like you men folks could think of somethin' better to do than speakin' disrespectful of the dead.

RUBE. All right, Lizzie. It's time we was tunin' up again, anyway. Let's hear the soothin' tones of your dulcet voice. (*Rises and announces*) Miss Lizzie Spriggs will render a sentimental ditty entitled ——— (*Name of song*)

No. 5. *Song by LIZZIE. Others join in chorus.*

RUBE (*after number, to SI*). Si, I been waitin' quite a spell now fer you to go ahead and decide whether or not you're goin' to buy that chestnut hoss of mine you was a-lookin' at.

SI. Well, Rube, to tell the truth, it's powerful hard to decide.

RUBE. You like the hoss, don't you?

SI. In some ways I like the critter, and then again in some other ways I don't.

RUBE. Anything wrong with the price?

SI. Nope. Price is all right.

RUBE. Steps right along, don't he?

SI. Yep. He's got some mighty nice gaits.

RUBE. Ain't I guaranteed that he won't balk, that he won't run away and that a child kin drive him?

SI. You have so.

RUBE. He's in good condition, too, that hoss is. Did you take notice to what a nice, silky coat he has?

SI. I ain't worryin' about his coat.

RUBE (*impatiently*). Then why in tarnation don't you buy the critter?

SI. I like his coat, all right. But to tell the truth, Rube, I don't jest like his pants.

LIZZIE. Excuse me fer interruptin', Rube, but I jest thought of somethin' that I would like to ask you a favor about.

RUBE. All right, Lizzie. I'm a-listenin'.

LIZZIE. You know I been lookin' fer a hired man to work around my place, and the idee jest come to me that if you could announce it in front of all this crowd it would be sort of a advertisement like, and maybe somebuddy would want the job.

RUBE. Right you are, Lizzie. Ought not to be no trouble at all. Here's Bill, here. That ought to be a good job fer Bill. How about it, Bill?

BILL. I ain't sayin' Yes or No till I find out more about the job.

LIZZIE. I'm lookin' fer a man who will do the chores around the house, sweep, run errands, do the dishes, clean the rooms, run the washin' machine, never smoke or chew or use bad language——

BILL (*interrupts*). Lady, you ain't lookin' for a hired man. You're lookin' for a husband.

RUBE (*announces next number*). Mr. Si Corntossel will now render —— (*Mentions title*)

No. 6. *Song by Si. Others join in chorus.*

RUBE (*after number*). Zeke, the boys tell me you have a right smart flock of chickens in your back yard.

ZEKE. The boys is truthful, Rube.

RUBE. You're quite an expert on poultry, I reckon?

ZEKE. Well, I should hope to fall down the cellar steps an' break my neck if I ain't.

RUBE. I was jest a-wonderin' if you could tell me a good rule fer tellin' the difference 'twixt a young chicken and a tough old bird.

ZEKE. You want to know how to tell the age of a chicken?

RUBE. That's it.

ZEKE. Rube, I'm supprised you ain't better informed on such subjects. What's the good of all our correspondence schools and all our income taxes and sech like if our leadin' citizens is goin' to go right on bein' as ignominious as what you are?

RUBE. That's all right. Go ahead and change the subjec' if you want to. It shows you can't answer my question.

ZEKE. It don't show nothin' of the kind. You want to know how to tell how old a chicken is. Any fool knows that.

RUBE. Sure. That's why I asked you.

ZEKE. I —— Hey, Rube, you're gettin' too jag-busted pussonal! Are you callin' me a fool?

RUBE. Can't you take a joke?

ZEKE. Callin' me a fool ain't no joke.

SI. That's right, Zeke. Anybody what calls you a fool ain't jokin'. They're talkin' sense.

ZEKE (*wants to fight*). By chowder, Si, that's carryin' things entirely too far. Them's fightin' words, an' I ——

RUBE. Boys, boys! Ain't no use gettin' all het up. I was jest askin' Zeke a question an' he couldn't answer it. Now we won't say no more about it.

ZEKE (*still sore*). Oh, *won't* we? Is that so? You want to know how to tell how old a chicken is?

RUBE. Yes. How do you tell?

ZEKE. By the teeth.

RUBE. A hen ain't got no teeth.

ZEKE. No. But I have.

RUBE (*announces next number*). Mrs. Hattie Smithers will render ——— (*Name of selection*)

No. 7. *Song by* HATTIE. *Others join in chorus.*

RUBE (*after number, Si gets up and starts to leave stage*). Hey there, Si, where you goin'?

SI (*stops and turns*). Home.

RUBE. Why, you can't go home yet. The show ain't over.

SI. Well, if you ask my opinion, I'll say the show ain't even started. If anybody asks *me*, I'll say you ain't got no show, never did have no show and never will have none.

RUBE. What in tarnation are you talkin' about, Si? What's the matter with this show?

SI. What's the matter with it? Everything's the matter with it. I never see sech a punk minstrel show in all my born days.

RUBE. Why, you pig-headed old hay-shaker, if you know so all-fired much about the show business maybe you'll tell us what's wrong with it?

SI. It ain't got no riddles into it. That's what's wrong with it.

RUBE. Riddles?

SI. Whoever seen a minstrel show as *was* a minstrel show that didn't have some riddles into it, I want to know?

RUBE. Oh. So that's your idee of a good minstrel show, is it? You want to tell some riddles, do you?

SI. That's me. I want to pull some wise cracks.

RUBE. All right. Have your own way. Sit down now and start 'er off.

SI (*sits*). Atta boy.

ZEKE (*sourly*). This is gonna be good.

SI. Want me to spring the fust one?

RUBE. That's the idee. We're waitin'.

SI (*full of confidence*). Fair enough. All right. Now listen. Get this. This'n is a jim slicker. It's a brand new one. This'll make 'em laugh.

ZEKE (*disgusted*). Well, well, go ahead. Quit advertisin', and show your goods.

SI. Listen now, Rube. Here's the riddle. Why does a chicken cross the street?

RUBE. Do you call that a new riddle?

SI. Sure, it's a new one.

RUBE. Why, Si, that riddle is a thousand years old. That's the oldest riddle in the world.

SI. Is it?

RUBE. And you said you had a new riddle!

SI (*crestfallen*). Well, I only heerd it yistiddy. (*Gets up, sadly*) I'm goin' home.

RUBE. Wait a minute. Sit down. (*SI sits*) We're goin' to go through with this if we bust a leg. Spring your riddle.

SI. Why does a chicken cross the street?

RUBE. I give it up.

SI. So did the other jackass. Haw-haw-haw! (*Laughs violently, then looks around and sees the others are all very solemn. Suddenly stops laughing and looks worried*)

ZEKE (*solemnly*). That reminds me of the story about the broken pencil.

SI. What was that?

ZEKE. No use tellin' it. They wasn't no point to it.

NOTE:—Any number of riddles, etc., may be introduced by members of the company.

RUBE (*rises and announces*). Bill will now render a song entitled —

No. 8. Song by BILL. Others join in chorus.

RUBE (*after number*). Tom, what in tarnation are you lookin' so sad an' downcast fer?

TOM (*sadly and solemnly*). Music always affects me that way, Rube. It gives me melancholic thoughts an' makes me feel like committin' suicide or recitin' poetry or doin' some other fool thing like that. I won't get no relief till I do.

RUBE. You mean you want to recite some poetry?

TOM. I don't *want* to, Rube—but I got to, or bust! I'm feelin' so emotional.

RUBE. All right. Go ahead.

TOM. I don't know as I ought to. This here poem is a awful sad poem, Rube. It'll have a terrible depressin' effect on the audience.

RUBE. It will, eh?

TOM. Still, I guess it won't have no more depressin' effect on the audience than that last song did.

BILL (*startled*). Hey?

TOM (*sadly*). No, Rube, I guess the folks has had their feelin's stirred up enough already.

BILL (*rises, addresses TOM*). Listen here, you big-mouthed yap, when I sing——

TOM (*rises*). Who you callin' a yap?

BILL. You! (*During argument BILL and TOM approach each other until they meet at c.*)

TOM. You're jest sore because you can't sing.

BILL. Who says I can't sing?

TOM. I say you can't sing. And I don't hear no objection.

BILL. Maybe you don't know I have a cultivated voice.

TOM. Cultivated?

BILL. That's it. My voice has been cultivated.

TOM. It sounded to me more as if it had been plowed.

BILL (*to RUBE*). I leave it to you, Rube. Did you notice my high notes? What do you think of my execution?

TOM. I'm in favor of it.

BILL (*proudly*). Critics who have heard me sing say I ought to travel.

TOM. I'm in favor of that, too; the farther the better.

BILL (*angrily*). I've heard enough from you!

TOM. I've heard too much from you. I always thought you was a good singer ——

BILL (*placated*). That's better.

TOM. Until I heard you sing.

RUBE (*comes between them*). Here, here, boys, this won't do. You're bustin' up the show.

BILL. I don't care! Nobody can talk the way he does and get away with it.

TOM. And nobody can sing the way he does and get away with it.

RUBE (*yells*). Listen, will you? These folks don't care nothin' about you two fellers argufyin'. Will you set down?

BILL (*sits*). All right, Rube. Let him talk big if he wants to. He's mad because they didn't applaud his song as much as they did mine.

TOM. Oh, is that *so*? I'm mad, am I? Maybe I don't go braggin' around about what kind of a singer I am. Maybe I ain't had my voice irrigated. But I'm goin' to recite, dog-gone it, and *then* see who makes the hit!

RUBE. Go to it, Tom. (*Sits*)

TOM (*advances to footlights and addresses pianist or orchestra leader*). Have you got the music there that they play when Little Eva goes to Heaven?

PIANIST. Yes.

BILL. What you goin' to do? Give a lifelike imitation of a bloodhound?

TOM (*assumes oratorical pose and recites, in slow and very much overdone melodramatic manner, to accompaniment of pathetic music*).

Two little fleas together sat,
 And one to the other said:
 "I have no place to hang my hat
 Since my old dog is dead.
 I've traveled this world from place to place
 And farther I will roam,
 But the first darn dog that shows his face
 Will be my home sweet home."

(TOM *makes elaborate bow, as if acknowledging tremendous applause, and returns to seat*)

BILL. I have just one more remark I want to make.

RUBE. What's that?

BILL. I accept his apology.

RUBE (*rises and announces*). The closing chorus, by the entire company — (*All rise promptly as music starts*)

No. 9. Closing Chorus, *by entire company.*

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